

What is Chickenpox?



Chickenpox is a contagious infection caused by the Varicella virus. The virus causes a rash of itchy blisters on the skin and sometimes in the mouth, and throat.

How is chickenpox spread?

- It usually enters the body through the mouth and nose when someone who is sick with chickenpox sneezes or coughs.
- When the sick person sneezes or coughs, tiny drops of fluid that are filled with the virus are sprayed into the air.
- Other people breathe in these tiny drops of fluid and can become sick.
- A person can also catch chickenpox by touching the fluid from chickenpox blisters. The fluid in the blisters is full of the chickenpox virus.

If a person is not immune to the chickenpox virus, he or she will usually break out in a chickenpox rash anywhere from 10 to 21 days after being exposed to the virus.

- Usually the person breaks out in a rash about two weeks after being exposed.
- Once a person has chickenpox, he or she is usually immune for life and can't catch chickenpox again.

A person who has chickenpox can spread the disease to others from about two days before breaking out in the rash until all the itchy blisters have dried up.

For most healthy children, chickenpox makes them feel bad and itchy for a few days, then it goes away. However, chickenpox can make a person very sick or even cause a person to die.

People who have not had chickenpox or are unsure if they have had chickenpox, should try not to be around people who are sick with chickenpox. Some of those people include:

- Pregnant women
- Babies
- People who have had organ transplants
- People taking a high dose of steroid medicine
- People who have cancer
- People who are HIV positive or have AIDS

What to look for:

A day or two before breaking out in the chickenpox rash, many children:

- Feel bad
- Have a headache and/or body aches
- Have a low fever
- Do not feel like eating

Some children may not feel bad before they break out in the rash.

About the chickenpox rash:

- The chickenpox rash usually starts as itchy, red blisters on the child's body and head.
- The rash then spreads to the arms and legs.
- The blisters break open in one to two days and make crusty scabs.
- Some children will only have a few chickenpox blisters, while others may have hundreds.
- Most children will have some blisters that are drying up while new ones are still forming.

Call before taking your child to a health care provider!

What is Chickenpox?

(continued)



Your provider may want you to bring your child somewhere other than the regular waiting room so other children won't be exposed to the chickenpox virus.

There is a vaccine for chickenpox.

- The vaccine for chickenpox can be given to healthy children over 12 months of age, teens, and adults who have never had chickenpox.
- The vaccine protects your child from getting sick if they are around someone with chickenpox.
- Contact your child's health care provider or local public health department for information about the vaccine.

Information from DHEC's Child Care and School Exclusion Lists: Exclude children with Varicella (chickenpox) until all lesions have dried and crusted (usually six days after onset of rash).

For additional information about exclusion when a child has chickenpox, see the DHEC Child Care and School Exclusion Lists of Contagious or Communicable Diseases at <http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/exclusion.htm>

Child's Name _____

School Nurse _____

Date _____

School _____

School Phone Number (_____) _____



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